dence of belonging. Van der Kwaak explains the cultural context in which pasta and other foods function as a sign of respect for visitors in Somalia.

All the researchers share gratitude for Geschiere's mentorship, rigor, and support; all the studies demonstrate the imprint of his ideas and concepts. Nonetheless the studies themselves are uneven, with some much more substantive than others. As a set they are effective in suggesting the broad scope and broader implications of Geschiere's contributions, but it is that breadth itself that deprives the book of a clear focus. A more substantive job of editing might have expanded some areas and perhaps redirected others to produce a more uniformly compelling set of essays.

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**David Graeber. *Lost People: Magic and the Legacy of Slavery in Madagascar.*** Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007. xiii + 469 pp. Maps. Notes. Figures. Bibliography. Index. $65.00. Cloth. $29.95. Paper.

This rich book, which made me feel almost as if I knew its protagonists, provides us with an innovative account of the political nature of the apparently unpolitical. The core ethnography introduces the small village of Betafo in central rural Madagascar, where two groups of people had been involved in rivalry over status and dominance for decades. One of them, Graeber tells us, was of noble origin, the other of slave origin. While the nobles had lost all of their past glory and become impoverished, the former slaves had obtained a position of leadership. This happened because they were able to take control over most of the agricultural land and managed to establish themselves as having access to knowledge about witchcraft medicine and other special sources of power.

In fact, the successful creation of a reputation of having access to such powers, says Graeber, is the very stuff that politics is made of in rural Madagascar where, because of the general avoidance of open confrontation, there is no tradition of competitive public debate. To do politics is to manipulate impressions through narratives and gossip; it is to stir others' imaginings that one might possess hidden powers and will thus be able to inflict harm.

The production of narratives is a key theme throughout the book. According to Graeber, the fight between the two groups goes back to a slave owner in the nineteenth century and his most enterprising slave who had a project of creating a lineage of his own and to that purpose competed with his master over who had more knowledge of medicine (281–82). However, there also exist numerous alternative narratives among the villagers. Members of the noble group attribute their fall primarily to their historical guilt of having been slave owners (though this does not resonate with other

ethnographic accounts [93–95]). Among the other group, there exists a multiplicity of stories about the past, each one exhibiting different levels of acceptance or rejection of the group's alleged slave origin. Promoted by the village's famous astrologer Ratsizafy, the politically dominant narrative claims descent from a king—a claim that Ratsizafy reinforced by building a type of tomb for his great ancestor that is reserved for the highest of nobles. Yet Graeber presents documentary evidence that Ratsizafy's group is actually of slave descent; unfortunately, however, this is mentioned only once in the book (246), so readers may be muddled at the end of four hundred pages as to what was, historically speaking, actually going on and whether the fight between the two groups is in fact an issue over slave descent or perhaps, another kind of political competition. However, *Lost People* is not a detective story, intended to set the record straight; rather, it is an account of political action through narratives and history-making.

A few years prior to Graeber's fieldwork Ratsizafy, in order to deal with repeated theft in the village had decided that the dust of the ancestors of both groups should be mixed. The event was followed, however, by economic disaster on both sides and was thus interpreted by the villagers as confirming, once and for all, that the descendants of the two great ancestors must remain apart. Thereafter, almost all daily contact between the two sides broke down, with each side walking on separate paths through the village. The focus of the book is an effort to understand this event. In Graeber's analysis, Ratsizafy's entire political agenda—promoted through narratives about the past and his knowledge of medicine—was the construction of an elaborate disguise of his group's slave origin and its replacement with a noble one. The mixing of the two ancestors was to be the final coup.

In comparison to other descriptions of the legacy of slave descent in the Malagasy highlands, Graeber's ethnography is exceptional. Other studies have shown that although slave descent continues to be a heavy burden, in contexts of migration it is possible for people of slave descent to make a new start in a new place (see e.g., M. Bloch on Merina social structures in *American Anthropologist* 73 [1971]; J. Ramamonjisoain *Cahiers des Sciences Sociales* 1 [1984]; I. Rakoto on Madagascar [Musée d'art et d'archéologie, 1997]; and S. Evers on Madagascar [Brill, 2002]). Graeber, in contrast, writes of a society where the descendants of slaves have managed to take control over their former masters' land in the very same place where their ancestors had lived as slaves. This, to my knowledge, has never been reported before. Moreover, the nobles of Betafo acknowledge their defeat (93–94), though one is not sure whether this also applies to their many relatives who have left for the capital city.

However, even in the case of Betafo, Ratsizafy's enterprise of eradicating the difference between slaves and nonslaves was stopped, in the end, by local people's reactions to the mixing of the two ancestors. Thus although *Lost People* reminds us of the complexity of real life and the scope for maneu-

ver in society even in Betafo, it is still preferable there *not* to be a descendant of slaves.

Although its detail makes this a rather difficult book to read, the effort is well worth it for all those who want to learn more about "what makes us human," especially our "capacity to surprise" (388).

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**Elizabeth MacGonagle. *Crafting Identity in Zimbabwe and Mozambique.*** Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2007. ix + 192 pp. Maps. Figures. Notes. Illustrations. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. $75.00. Cloth.

Elizabeth MacGonagle's recent book, *Crafting Identity in Zimbabwe and Mozambique,* provides a rare and welcome contribution to the literature on Ndau communities that straddle the border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. In an effort to historicize recent literature on identity in Zimbabwe, her book examines issues of Ndau identity from the fifteenth century through the nineteenth century, with a series of chapters exploring Ndau ethnicity, history, and society.

Chapter 1 provides a synopsis of Ndau history and introduces the main thesis that Ndau ethnic identity predates colonialism; this suggestion that ethnicity is precolonial contradicts the position of many anthropologists and historians, such as Terence Ranger, who have highlighted the colonial role in the emergence of ethnicity and tribalism in Zimbabwe and elsewhere. Chapter 2 advances these themes and addresses the writings of early Portuguese commentators in southern Africa. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the political, economic, and social means by which people in this area have formed common identities and dealt with outside interference. Chapters 5 and 6 address the specifics of Ndau practice as they solidify and shape local group identities, including ceremonial practices, features of adornment, and the court system. In the strongest section of the book, chapter 7, MacGonagle explores the legacy of the Gaza Nguni invasion and that of their final leader, Ngungunyana. Chapter 8 synthesizes these issues of past and present in Ndau society and concludes that "neither the pressures of colonialism nor the politics of nationalism created a sense of being Ndau. Evidence shows that Ndauness... was shaped as an ongoing practice in the precolonial period" (106).

MacGonagle's thesis is difficult to defend, and the evidence she presents in a pithy 113 pages of text does little to support the main argument. While MacGonagle shows convincingly how variables such as political affiliation, language, familial ties, and spiritual practices bring people together in social identities that have been forming and reforming for centuries, these